



MIAMI BEACH

OFFICE OF THE CITY MANAGER

NO. LTC # 098-2006

LETTER TO COMMISSION

TO: Mayor David Dermer and Members of the City Commission

FROM: Jorge M. Gonzalez, City Manager

DATE: April 6, 2006

SUBJECT: Cultural Arts Council Grants Changes

This Letter to Commission is to inform you of changes made to this year's cultural grants program. As you may know, each year the Cultural Arts Council (CAC) and staff review the cultural grants program to see how it might be improved and strengthened. This evaluation includes feedback from panelists, grantees, and colleagues. This information, together with recommendations voiced by Council Members and staff at the CAC's July 2005 retreat, led to a number of recommendations that were subsequently approved by the CAC.

For the FY 06/07 cultural grant program cycle, the CAC has approved two significant changes designed to increase competition, eliminate any potential inequities and maximize the impact of grant dollars. It is anticipated that these changes will result in fewer but larger, more significant grants with greater return for Miami Beach's residents and visitors.

The first change involves the process for the allocation of grant funds. In previous years, the available grant funds were divided up amongst the various grant programs prior to the panel meetings. Individual panels for each program scored the applicants in that program and recommended funding accordingly, awarding all of the grant funds allocated to them. As a result, if one category had several strong applications, none could receive full funding since allotted funds had to be divided proportionately; similarly, if there were no high-scoring applications in a given category, some weak applications were funded simply because the money was there to spend. To eliminate this inequity, the CAC has amended the program so that all applicants compete for the same pool of funds. Therefore, funds will no longer be pre-allocated by discipline, leveling the playing field by having all applicants compete against each other. Therefore, funding recommendations will be removed from initial panel meetings. Once all applications in all categories have been scored by the panel, the applications will be ranked from high to low and funded from the top down until all funds are dispersed. For example, an application with a score of 95 would be recommended to receive 95% of requested funding; a score of 92 would receive 92%, and so on until the money runs out. As a result only the strongest applications, regardless of category, will be funded.

This change necessitates another. In prior years two CAC members sat on each panel alongside two to four community "experts" with their own criteria and approach to judging and scoring. Some panels were very generous with scores while others were far more critical. Now that all applicants compete for the same pool of funds, in the interest of fairness it is important that all applicants be judged by the same panel. The eleven members of the CAC have agreed to undertake that responsibility, insuring that each application is treated in a fair and consistent manner, and that the grants awarded are in keeping with the mission and goals of the CAC and City.

While these changes may be seen as placing more emphasis on quality product and less on artistic support, the CAC is underscoring its commitment to artistic development in two key ways. It is distinguishing between creating art and presenting art by restricting Artistic Disciplines applicants to artists/performers only, moving others formerly in this category to the Cultural Presenters program. Further, funding in Artistic Disciplines is now limited to project-specific grants supporting only new work or work being presented for the first time in Miami Beach. Maximum request amounts are based on project budgets rather than organization budgets to encourage smaller organizations to undertake larger projects in the City.

Finally, a new program, Cultural Heritage, has been instituted to support arts programming at resident organizations not primarily arts-oriented but devoted to presenting, preserving and/or protecting the diverse cultural heritage of Miami Beach. The CAC firmly believes that these changes will increase the impact of the cultural grants program by being more responsive to the needs of our resident and visitor audiences.

JMG\HFMAS\gf

c: Hilda Fernandez, Assistant City Manager
Max A. Sklar, Tourism and Cultural Development Director
Gary Farmer, Cultural Affairs Program Manager

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